Excerpt from A. Toaff, *Pasque di sangue*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2008, II edizione, Postfazione, pp. 363-398

Afterword

Trials and Historical Methodology. In defence of *Pasque di Sangue*

Even before my *Pasque di Sangue* appeared in the bookshops – and then immediately thereafter by critics who had not even read the book – I was attacked with extreme violence in Italy, Israel and the United States for what I had written, and not only on scientific grounds, but also and above all on ethical and political ones. I do not presume my book to be without defects, but I deem unjustified the harsh attacks to which it has been subject: all the more so in a country like Italy, where critical pillorying is unknown, and where books of a scientific validity indubitably inferior to mine have been published and reviewed indulgently.

Here I intend to answer the criticisms brought against me by historians, but only those criticisms which have been directed at my research methodology, my selection and use of sources, the legitimacy of my hypotheses, and the conclusions that I have drawn. I shall do so in detailed and documented manner in order to avoid possible – unintentional or deliberate – misunderstandings. As lamented by a learned rabbi of nineteenth-century Ancona, "words issue from your mouth, they fly away with the wind, they reach the ears of your neighbours. Those who love you will hear what you say, those who wish ill of you will hear what they want to hear".

Foreword

To forestall all possible misinterpretations, I shall summarize the subject and the scope of my research. First I shall clarify that I have no doubts that the so-called "ritual homicides or infanticides" pertain to the realm of myth; they were not rites

practised by the Jewish communities living and working in the German-speaking lands or in the North of Italy, and of which they were accused in the Middle Ages and the periods thereafter. That of ritual murder is and always has been a slanderous stereotype. Nevertheless, one cannot exclude the possibility that certain criminal acts, disguised as crude rituals, were indeed committed by extremist groups or by individuals demented by religious mania and blinded by desire for revenge against those considered responsible for their people's sorrows and tragedies. However, the sole and problematic support for this hypothesis are confessions extracted with the violence of torture and torment, and whose truthfulness is entirely to be demonstrated.

That said, I wish to specify that the principal aim of my research was to investigate the role of the so-called 'blood culture' in the German-speaking Jewish community, as in the Christian society that surrounded it. This was a manifold, therapeutic, magical, propitiatory, alchemic role which flouted the strict biblical and rabbinic prohibitions on the consumption of blood. In substance, I sought to investigate how, in this regard as well, practice shaped by external influences modified the norm, and to determine its consequences, unforeseen or predictable, for the Jews' openly conflictual relationship with the Christian community. In other words, I intended to reconstruct and revivify the popular beliefs of mediaeval Ashkenazi Judaism: an underground world, awash with superstition and magic, and animated by visceral anti-Christianism; a world which, more or less intentionally, has until recently been left in oblivion.

The ample body of documentation on the trial held in Trent on the infanticide of the child Simon (1475) enabled me to conduct detailed examination of the confessions made by the accused Jews. I considered whether these confessions – also bearing in mind that they had been extracted under torture – comprised elements referable to the mentality, traditions and rites of those Jews, as regards both their daily lives and their celebration of festivals, in particular Passover. On the basis of significant comparisons and cross-checks with the Jewish sources, I reached the conclusion that there was solid evidence to suggest that a magical and symbolic use of blood, dried and reduced to powder, had with time, and despite the opposition of the rabbis, become an integral part of particular rites and liturgies performed to celebrate Passover. The image that emerges from an important body of Jewish documentation, recently

published by Israel Yuval, is confirmed by the account provided by the accused of Trent, which clearly indicates that this image characterized groups of Ashkenazi extremists, whose numbers, however, are not easy to quantify. These groups, which belonged to the German Judaism ravaged by the traumas of the crusades, massacres and forced baptisms, expressed their hatred of Christianity in the so-called "ritual of curses" enacted during the Passover feast. According to my hypothesis, which I believe is borne out by significant evidence, these ritualized anathemas were thought to acquire terrible magical force when grains of powdered Christian blood were symbolically dissolved in the wine, turning it into the blood of Edom, or Christianity, the relentless persecutor against which the curses were directed. On conclusion of the anathematizing liturgy, the polluted wine was thrown away, without passing the lips of the celebrants. But between this dried blood used in the rite – blood which originated from unknown 'donors', alive and well, and mostly belonging to indigent families – and alleged ritual murders there was no relationship whatsoever save in the minds of judges (and not only those of Trent) as they endeavoured to prove the blood accusation against the Jews. Through their tendentious interpretations, the magical, therapeutic, alchemic, propitious or maleficent use of blood served to give plausible support to the deadly blood libel.

It is at this point that I assert my view that scientific research – in history as well – cannot be subject to any prior conditioning imposed by ideological doctrine or by political opportunism. There is consequently no sector of historical research in which the scholar cannot enter for fear that even mere hypotheses may run counter to what is deemed politically correct and is generally approved. Otherwise the principles of freedom and progress that underpin scientific inquiry and its ability to disrupt existing paradigms will be severely impaired. The search for historical truth cannot and must not be subservient to considerations of political expediency. Nor can it be conditioned by the risk that its findings may be distorted and exploited. However, once historians enter the 'minefield' that they have chosen to investigate, it is their duty to interpret the documents correctly, to bring new sources to light, or to re-read ones already known from new and scientifically plausible standpoints. And they must support their hypotheses with arguments whose robustness must constantly be verified.

When the intention is to conduct research into Jewish history, the problems become especially complex. If the researcher does not want to produce a predictable apologia or to add yet another brick to the a-temporal and hackneyed reconstruction of the past, there arises the real and intimidating danger of the anti-Semitism, infinite distortions, generalizations in bad faith, and hatred for Jews and Israel today so fraught with menace. So is the game worth the candle? My answer is, despite everything, unequivocally in the affirmative. Knowing the real history of the Jews (not of Judaism) in both its positive and controversial aspects, and abandoning the narrative of the Vale of Tears where the victims are always the same, can only serve to strengthen Jewish identity. I refer, not to the virtual and edifying identity projected as benevolent – and sometimes indeed invented by enlightened sectors of society – but to an active and effective identity in history; a vigorous identity which emerges in history with all its errors and inevitable contradictions, and is extraneous to artificial or instrumental schematisms.

Paradoxically, among those who openly oppose this historical viewpoint, besides those who care for Jews and seek to embrace them, sometimes suffocatingly, there are many Jews themselves who view the historian's work with suspicious, if not downright disapproval. As Yosef Haim Yerushalmi has acutely observed, "those Jews who still try to remain within the charmed circle of tradition, or who have recently joined it, consider the work of the historian to be entirely irrelevant: they do not want the historicity of the past, but rather its eternal, immutable contemporaneousness"[1]. I consequently stress that it is not possible to charge those who seriously intend to conduct research in Jewish history with outright rejection of the anti-historical currents in modern Judaism, driven by worries which, though legitimate, are entirely extraneous to the work of the historian. Dialogue with these currents may usefully take place in other arenas, but not in that of scientific research.

I briefly mention the mass media, with their interest in the abnormal and the scandalous, and which condition large part of public opinion on topics about which it is often ignorant and demands to know the gist immediately. In this situation, the art of presenting a book without bothering to read it becomes consummate. As Pierre Bayard (*Comment parler des livres que l'on n' a pas lus*?, Paris, 2007) has recently wittily written, all

it takes is to read the cover, imagine the contents of the book, and read a review of it hastily written by someone who may or may not have read the text, to provoke debate, prompt academic conferences, and incite intervention by politicians and men of the church or synagogue. A historical study – which should be examined and judged by practitioners using the tools of their profession – becomes easy and desirable prey for know-it-alls in search of scandal and high sales. The historian's complicity in arousing media uproar for promotional purposes is entirely counter-productive because it nullifies his professional seriousness. Libraries and archives, seminars and lecture halls are perhaps less attractive than television studios or newspaper editorial offices, but they are indubitably the only natural environment for the historian: externally to them, historians move like fish out of water, losing the tools and language of their work, and with audiences inevitably different from those that they intended to address.

Methodology

It has been widely argued that the records of inquisitional trials, conducted amid secrecy and arbitrariness, and with the aberrant and systematic use of torture to extract contrived and symmetrical confessions, can at most be used to document persecution and the mentality of the persecutors. The depositions of the convicted are – it is maintained – obviously unreliable because they have been obtained through the dreadful power of torture, a device capable of extorting confessions to anything whatever. Granting even a patina of reliability to the confessions of Jews in trials on the blood accusation would be like believing in the guilt of the witches (who inherited the stereotype) accused of nocturnal flights astride broomsticks, and of obscene couplings with the devil.

Yet outright dismissal of trial documents and confessions extracted under torture is only apparently possible, like the profitable reference to witches. In fact, while obviously condemning a cruel and despicable inquisitorial device (unfortunately still used today), one may legitimately ask whether the tortured always lied, and whether they confessed always and only what the torturers wanted to hear. In other words, although the confessions ex-

torted by the judges and by the investigators were not generally truthful, can we say that they were always false? By dismissing out of hand the validity of confessions obtained under torture, one runs the risk of invalidating large part of the studies – also excellent and recent – on heresies and heretics almost entirely based on trial records[2].

And then how should we treat those cases in which the accused did not confirm the accusations even when they were tortured? Consider the example of Roper, known as Schneider Jüd, a Christian tailor friend to the Jews of Trent, and who frequented their homes. He was arrested with the others accused and then repeatedly subjected to vicious torture by the judges in order to extract a confession. Yet the good German admitted nothing because, I believe, he knew nothing, with the consequence that the judges were forced to release him. Must we say that in this case the Christian tailor's physical constitution was more robust than that of the Jews, so that he was able to withstand the torment of torture without confessing? Or must we assume with Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia (*Trent 1475. A Ritual Murder Trial*, New Haven, Conn., 1992) that the tailor's deep affection for the Jewish families gave him sufficient strength to bear the suffering? It seems hardly likely.

Furthermore, in other cases of considerable importance, a large – and often the most accredited – part of Jewish historiography treats the confessions of torture victims in the diametrically opposite manner, granting them a plausibility and credibility with extraordinary implications. I refer to the trials mounted by the Iberian Inquisition against the New Christians, the so-called 'Marranos', accused of being crypto-Jews. Over the centuries, thousands of Spaniards and Portuguese were brought before the dreaded ecclesiastical courts, subjected to repeated torture, and forced to confess. Many were cruelly executed and their bodies burned in the *auto da fe*, the victims of a perverse system which permitted no valid legal defence. Here too there were serial denunciations, and confessions were detailed and consistent. And here too the trial records are almost the only documents that inform us about the Marrano heresy, whether it actually existed or was presumed.

Yet some of the foremost Jewish historians have expressed no doubts on the matter. The confessions of the accused, even though they suffered excruciating torment, faithfully testified

to their secret rites and to their complete and unyielding Judaism (which was precisely what the inquisitors wanted them to confess). Thus Yitzhak Baer (*A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Philadelphia, Pa., 1961) has fully endorsed the romantic and stereotyped thesis that a heroic, underground Judaism emerges from the documents of the Inquisition. The trials consequently evinced "that most of the *conversos* were real Jews", that "*conversos* and Jews constituted the same people, united by links of religion, destiny and messianic faith", and that "in essence, the Inquisition was correct in its reading of the *conversos*' attitudes".

> The confessions and testimonies contained in these records breathe a nostalgic yearning for the national homeland, both earthly and heavenly, a yearning for all things, great and small, sanctified by the national tradition, and for something even greater, which had created the people and maintained it in life[3].

However, there are scholars who have cast serious doubts on the plausibility of this idyllic reconstruction of the Jewish-Converso heresy. The Portuguese historian Antonio Jose Saraiva (*Inquisiçao and Cristaos Novos*, Oporto, 1969) has vigorously argued that the true purpose of the Holy Office was to 'manufacture' Judaizers rather than destroy them. Almost all of the Inquisition's victims, tortured and self-confessed heretics, were instead sincere Catholics entirely extraneous to Jewish practices[4]. But Saraiva's conclusions have been generally and deliberately ignored, or else vehemently contested by Jewish historiography[5]. Before Saraiva, a Jewish historian, Benzion Netanyahu (*The Marranos of Spain*, New York, 1966), obtained similar research results, which induced him to conclude that the *Conversos* were wholly alien to the practices of Judaism. Those Marranos indicted and tortured would have confessed to whatever the Inquisition wanted. Netanyahu's counter-mainstream thesis, intended to dispel the myth of the Marranos' Jewishness, led to his virtual banishment from the Israeli academic community: only in America could he find a publisher for his studies[6].

Also Anna Foa (*Ebrei d'Europa dalla peste nera all'emancipazione*, Bari, 1992) has acknowledged the problems surrounding the inquisitional trials instituted to eradicate the alleged Marrano heresy. She aptly enquires whether admissions extracted by tor-

ture could reflect the reality, or whether they merely testified to the repressive fantasies of the judges. But she also stresses their importance, indeed gives them absolute priority as sources, "because they are substantially the only ones able to give voice to the protagonists". Finally, however, prompted by Eliezer Gutwirth's studies on the confessions of the Spanish Marranos before the Inquisition, Foa regards them as by and large reliable – and thus plainly contradicts herself.

> The trials of the Inquisition demonstrate – with greater or lesser veracity – that the New Christians remained secretly faithful to the religion of their fathers; and they bring to light complicity and mutual protection between Jews and *Conversos* [...]. The ancient networks of friendship and kinship had survived forced conversion. Jews and New Christians continued to share customs, memories, and even the use of Hebrew (pp. 128, 315-6).

What, therefore, accounts for this disparity in the scholarly treatment of confessions extorted by torture? Did the Spanish and Portuguese inquisitions use methods less harsh than those of the judges in Trent? Or must we believe that, for unknown reasons, the accused put to torture by Hinderbach only told lies, whereas those stretched on the rack by the Iberian inquisitors told truths?[7]

One gains the impression that numerous scholars propound the reassuring thesis that it is not an error to accept the reality of accusations deemed to be ennobling: for instance, the accusation that the *conversos* secretly adhered to the religion of their forefathers despite the violence and persecution to which they were subjected. But it is a grave error to give the slightest plausibility to charges which today strike us as abhorrent because they concerned the magical and superstitious use of blood, or rituals based on invective, malediction and exorcism. These are therefore choices made on ethical grounds, rather than being correct and consistent interpretations of the source materials[8].

On the other hand there is the position of reputable researchers, like Adriano Prosperi, whose treatments of the inquisitional trials against Jews and *conversos* seem wholly coherent. Consequently, I fear that in their opinion the trials merely reflected the stereotypes and preconceptions of the Christian society represented by the judges. Consequently, they maintain, Jewish history generally coincides with the history of anti-Semitism, in which the Jews

constantly occupy the passive and wretched role of the victims.

Prosperi therefore agrees with Saraiva that the Iberian Inquisition was only a relentless 'factory' of Jews and Judaizers, "a machine that made money by imposing a bureaucratic identity of Jewishness on victims forced to confess that they were what they were not" The trials of the Marranos can at most inform us about the ideologies and the mentality of the inquisitors; in no wise can they be taken to document the lives, habits, and thought processes of the defendants. Wherever Jews were brought to inquisitional trial there loomed the dreadful spectre of the Shoah, and with it pressure to express contrition and repentance towards what has always counted in history: Christian society. And this does not seem to diverge greatly from the theories expressed on the matter by Gavin Langmuir.

"Since Auschwitz," writes Prosperi, "the historical problem of the remote origins of anti-Semitism and its cultural roots stands before us. It must be analysed in the often impalpable and unnoticed forms in which the tensions that exploded so terribly in the twentieth century had accumulated for centuries, in a process as long as the history of Europe itself". He continues: "The materials furnished by the Inquisition-related sources belong to the distant past, but at the same time they concern matters that still trouble the life of the present and extend an ominous shadow over the future"[9].

For my part, I continue to believe in the validity of Carlo Ginzburg's methodological principle that even the documents of the persecution, such as confessions extracted under torture, comprise authentic fragments of the persecuted culture which the judges were unable entirely to erase. The so-called 'circumstantial paradigm' applied in the absence or scarcity of sure proof has enabled in the past, and still does, a re-reading of documentation interrogated afresh and from different perspectives[10]. However, there are those who maintain that Ginzburg has abandoned this method of investigation, and they applaud his supposed recent "salutary return to political history after so many circumstantial paradigms"[11]. And perhaps those who think so are correct, considering that Ginzburg himself relegates the circumstantial paradigm to his past, calling it "a principle of method that many years ago inspired a research study of mine on the stereotype of the witches' sabbath" (*Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba*, Turin, 1989).

Granting for the sake of argument that the circumstantial paradigm method is still valid, Ginzburg has accused me of committing unpardonable errors by identifying not myths but rites in the documents on ritual murders, contrary to his conclusion in regard to the witches' sabbath[12]. In other words, in Ginzburg's opinion, I have anachronistically adhered to the discredited historiography of Margaret Murray (*The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, Oxford, 1921). Little matter that Ginzburg himself has been enlisted (in my view unjustly) among Murray's followers for what he wrote in *I benandanti*, amongst others by Gustav Henningsen (*The Witches' Advocate. Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition*, Reno, 1980) and by Norman Cohn (*Europe's Inner Demons*, London, 1975).

As well known, Murray, a disciple of Frazer, an English anthropologist and an egyptologist, argued that the descriptions of the sabbath contained in the witchcraft trial records were not introjections of hostile stereotypes suggested by the judges; rather, they were precise accounts of rites which had actually occurred. In other words, just as application of Murray's method gave credence to the witches' nocturnal flights and diabolic couplings, so I have allegedly given credence to the myth of ritual murder, presenting it as a rite that was actually practised[13]. As far as I am concerned, however, this is not how matters stand. I must specify once again that I too believe that so-called 'ritual murder' must be regarded as a myth and a calumny, not as a rite which pertained to the religious practices of the Jewish communities – not even in circumscribed historical contexts. This is regardless of the fact that the rite may sometimes have had some sort of counterpart in the wretched reality of crimes committed by individuals demented by religious fanaticism (*Pasque di sangue*, p. 121 [117]). But it is wrong to believe that other specific practices of the groups examined in my book, and which emerged from testimonies obtained under torture, can also be considered entirely equivalent to myths.

Some years ago, the Israeli historian Israel Yuval (*'Two Nations in Your Womb'. Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Tel Aviv, 2000) reconstructed the rites and particular liturgy of extremist fringe groups operating within the Jewish communities of Germany that had lived through the massacres and forced conversions of the age of the crusades. Yuval, who had not examined the trials in Trent, reconstructed the anti-Christian 'ritual of curses' performed at

Passover by these Ashkenazi Jews. The ritual was enacted during the *Haggadah*, when the ten plagues of Egypt were recited and wine was rhythmically sprinkled from the chalice onto the dining table.

The rite with its specific formulas – absent from the Passover liturgy of the Italian, Sephardic and Oriental Jews, besides that generally adopted by the Ashkenazi – emerged from the *Sefer Harokeach*, the writings of rabbi Jacob Mulin Segal (*Maharil*), who also lived in Italy at the turn of the fifteenth century, and certain Franco-German Jewish texts which have survived in manuscript form[14]. Yuval concluded by stressing that the ritual of curses in the *Haggadah* transformed the original contents of Passover, replacing those bound up with historical memory of the liberation from Egypt with a vision of Messianic redemption founded upon revenge against the Christians, "using particularly violent and expressions, for which one searches in vain among the Jews of Iberian origin"[15].

And yet the ritual of the curses reconstructed by Yuval appears in identical form – with the same particular liturgy and sequence of operations – in the confessions made by the accused Jews in Trent. The implications of this finding should not be underestimated if one wishes to reconstruct the mentality of the Ashkenazi Jews who had moved to Trent from Germany. Moreover, as I shall seek to clarify further, nor is the reality of the rite of the Christian blood in the wine of the Passover supper a hypothesis that can be discarded *a priori*.

I disagree with Carlo Ginzburg's comment that "those accounts (of alleged ritual murders) were inserted into descriptions of ceremonies as familiar to the accused as, presumably, the Passover" was, and that "the presence of anti-Christian elements in the ritual described by the accused under torture" was "a generic cultural feature". In fact, the confessions of the accused show very clearly that these were not ordinary Passover ceremonies, but rather particular rites performed by fringe German Jewish groups characterized by a virulent anti-Christianism.

For that matter, also in the past, the depositions made under torture by the accused of Trent have been used as credible historical sources[16]. Examination of the confession by Lazzaro da Serravalle, a servant of Angelo da Verona, regarding the Passover sermon delivered by Samuele da Norimberga, reveals its central motif: the spurious birth of Jesus conceived by the Virgin during her menstrual period.

As has been rightly stressed, this theme appeared only in some late-fifteenth and sixteenth century versions of the well-known anti-Christian text *Toledot Yeshu*, 'The Stories of Jesus': whence derives "the importance of the information inferred from the Trent trial, which at present is the earliest source that expressly considers Jesus to be the child of a menstruating woman". It has also been rightly stressed that "worthy of note is the German origin of the narrator, which suggests that the information also had the same origin"[17]. It is evident that the anti-Christian confession extracted under torture from Lazzaro da Serravalle has not, at least in this case, been considered to stem from interpolations by the biased Trent judges. Rather, it is an intact and authentic fragment of the mentality and culture of the Ashkenazi Jews brought to trial. In this regard, I do not believe that uncritical use has been made of unreliable, or at least suspect, sources.

With some surprise I find that Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia agrees with me on the authenticity of the trial records concerning the anti-Christian invective and fervent profession of faith expressed before his torture by Israel of Brandenburg, a protagonist of the Trent trial. Torture is indeed the source of hatred[18]. But why should one believe that the young German Jew's virulent hostility towards Christianity was not already part of the cultural heritage and mentality of the Jewish community to which he belonged, regardless of the torments to which he was subjected?

I have repeatedly stressed that the testimonies of the accused in the Trent trial should not be dismissed out of hand. Instead, they warrant careful analysis, with suitable comparisons and references backing well-founded hypotheses. As has recently been aptly pointed out,

> historians of pre-modern Europe have routinely relied on Inquisition documents and other archival records of trials as primary sources for years. Given the use of torture in medieval and early modern judicial systems, how one uses these systems is a tricky methodological problem. The best approaches, it seems to me, are those that regard archival sources (all of them) as texts to be interpreted, in which authorship, intended audience, genre, political considerations in the production and conservation of the material, language (both langue and parole for you structuralists), and a host of other factors, have to be considered in order to make sense of what these pieces of past writing can actually tell us. In terms of methodology, this seems to be the central question in evaluating Toaff's work, and not to suggest that using the trial records at all was wrong[19].

This, also in my opinion, is the crux of the matter, not the uncritical and preconceived banishment of the trial sources considered suspect.

Equivocal and suspect sources

I have been accused of using in my text numerous polluted testimonies of anti-Semites and converts, the latter obviously harbouring malice towards their previous co-religionists. In the first place, it is alleged that I have drawn indiscriminately on the 'ill-famed' *Dissertazione apologetica sul martirio del beato Simone da Trent* (Trent, 1747) written by the Franciscan Benedetto Bonelli: a hagiographic text unanimously discredited by authoritative historians.

Yet I challenge those who have read my book to cite just one instance where I refer to the theses put forward in the *Dissertazione*, which I adjudge to be "invalidated by anti-Semitic prejudice"[20]. Nevertheless, Bonelli's transcriptions of the Trent trial texts are invariably faithful and accurate. Proof is provided by the part of the *Dissertazione* already published by Quaglioni and Esposito, where no differences whatsoever are apparent[21]. My book refers to these transcriptions, almost always reported by Bonelli in his notes, because I consider them reliable and technically accurate. My quotations from Bonelli therefore exclusively concern the Trent trial records not yet edited by Quaglioni: their forthcoming publication will indubitably confirm my assessment of them.

I have followed the same procedure with another declaredly hagiographic text, that by the priest Giuseppe Divina, *Storia del Beato Simone da Trent* (Trent, 1902). Omitting entirely the apologetic lucubrations and anti-Semitic ravings of the Trentino priest, I have cited only that part of his text which, as Quaglioni has already remarked, constitutes "almost a pure and simple paraphrase of the trial records"[22].

Separate treatment is required for the texts of the converted Jews, which I have used in *Pasque di Sangue* in analogous manner as in my previous books, which were instead praised and appreciated by my critics. There are those who have sought to extend their censure to my colleague Elliot Horowitz as well, accusing him of delving too deeply into the unreliable and tendentious literature of the neophytes.

I cite the most significant example: that of the bulky conversionist text written by the Venetian Shemuel Nahmias, former disciple of Leon da Modena, and baptized as Giulio Morosini (*Derekh Emunah. Via della fede mostrata agli ebrei*, Rome, 1683). I have no hesitation in arguing that Morosini's text is of exceptional importance, and is in some respects unique, because it preserves in detail and with absolute fidelity the rites and popular beliefs, even the most ancient of them, current among the Jews of Italy, and which would otherwise have been irretrievably lost to memory. It is my opinion that (aside from his personal comments prompted by evident anti-Jewish resentment) Morosini's recording of the Jewish religious customs is more extensive, detailed, and less reticent than the exaggeratedly celebrated *Riti ebraici* of Leon da Modena (Paris, 1637; Venice, 1638).

The importance of this text, in fact, does not reside in its polemical, confessional or controversist theses, but rather, as Fausto Parente underlines, in "the author's truly ubiquitous knowledge of Jewish ritual"[23]. Indeed, all the foremost historians of Italian Jewry, from Cecil Roth to Avigdor Shulvass, have made ample use of Morosini's text, considering it "a historical source on Jewish social life of exceptional value". No serious study on the manifold and significant aspects of religious anthropology on the Jews in Italy can ignore the *Derekh Emunah* without being severely impaired.

The Ashkenazi between the Rhine and the Adige

The fact that I attribute the stereotype of ritual murder to the Ashkenazi Jewish world on both sides of the Alps, from the Rhine to upper Lombardy and North-East Italy, has provoked lively controversy[24]. But this is not my opinion alone. Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia himself writes that "if we construct a cultural geography of the blood libel in the region, the location of ritual murder trials coincided with the boundary of German settlements in the Alpine Highlands"[25]. And likewise Miri Rubin unhesitatingly states that, as regards trials for profanation of the host, "our story deals with German speaking regions"[26].

Improper reference has been made to the writings of Alfonso de Espina, the confessor of Henry IV of Castile, to show that the blood libel was widespread in Spain as well, and not confined

solely to the German-speaking lands[27]. In fact, as I have clearly shown, all the cases of presumed ritual murder reported by Alfonso in his *Fortalitium fidei* concerned Ashkenazi communities in northern Italy, not the larger ones established in the Iberian peninsula[28]. Moreover, the judges of Trent, who presumably detested the Italian Jews no less than they loathed the Ashkenazi, repeatedly asked the accused why the former had never been accused of practising the blood rites. Is it perhaps that the Italian Jews did not have the same sacred texts of reference, as the Ashkenazi of Trent seem to have suggested (*quod ipsi Iudei Italici non habent istud in scripturis suis*)?

I have sought to show how that German Jewish world, steeped in superstition and alchemic magic, traumatized by violence and tragedy, often lax in observing the laws of the country and sometimes even those of official Jewish ritual (*halakhah*), and suspicious of the Italians whether Jews or Christians, inevitably became the target of the blood libel[29]. My reconstruction of the mentality and behaviour of the Ashkenazi Judaism of Germanic origin has been substantially accepted by many scholars[30]. But others, instead, have judged it with unwarranted severity:

> Toaff has his own interpretative paradigm which attributes infanticide and ritual murder in general not to all Jews but only to the Ashkenazi. The Jewish world of the Germanic area, barbarized in its rituals, dominated by a superstitious faith in the therapeutic and magical uses of blood, and driven by a visceral hatred of the Christian population, seems to him responsible for the origin of infanticide and its diffusion as far as the Trentino and Venetian regions. But why does he not tell us that the bishop Hinderbach also came from the Germanic area, and that he was convinced of Jews' guilt even before the trial began?[31]

And yet my book is very explicit on this point:

> The participants in this magical mental domain were not only the Jews, accused of witchcraft and infanticide, of ritual cannibalism and malignant sorcery, but also their accusers, obsessed with diabolical apparitions and in constant search of virtuous talismans and wondrous antidotes able to fortify and to preserve both body and soul against the devices of men and demons. Giovanni Hinderbach, the prince-bishop of Trento, the prime mover of the 1475 trials, had grown up in the Vienna of the years following the great massacre of the Jews accused of supporting the Hussites (1421) and subjected by Duke Albert II to bloody vengeance as abettors of the heretics. Even before the infanticide of the child Simon, when Hinderbach

had not yet acquired his official fame as 'scourge of the murderous Jews', he had already manifested his dislike of them. On one occasion, indeed, he unhesitatingly expressed approval of cannibalism, provided that the victims were Jews. On the occasion of the war of 1465 between Venice and Trieste, when Frederick III sought to enforce his rights over the latter city, Hinderbach, then imperial ambassador to the Serenissima, sang the praises of the Habsurg militias summoned in defence of Trieste for their courage and loyalty to the emperor. Quite rightly, the pious bishop observed, the German soldiers, rather than lay down their arms, would assuage their hunger by eating the flesh of cats, mice and rats, and even that of their compatriot Jews in the city.
Frederick III, Burcardo di Andwil informs us, besides cultivating the mathematical sciences was an ardent practitioner of astrology and necromancy, and for this reason was said to surround himself with Jews and Chaldeans dedicated to superstitious practices. But his loyal servant Hinderbach was no less a devotee. Magic and witchcraft, in fact, exerted an irresistible fascination on the humanist bishop, a friend of Enea Silvio Piccolomini. He likened the Jews to necromancers ever ready to perform exorcisms and cast spells in the service of the devil. Demons loved blood, and the necromancers resuscitated corpses to make lavish use in their divinations of blood mixed with water from springs and rivers. Hinderbach unhesitatingly claimed that the Jews were sorcerers and necromancers "because they kill Christian children and drink and consume their blood, as they did last year here in the city of Trent, and as in many other places it has been discovered and proven". The practical *Kabbalah* performed more or less in secret by these Jews was likened in every respect to black magic and necromancy[32].

Also as regards the problematic deposition by Giovanni da Feltre, the Jewish convert held in the Buonconsiglio Castle who denounced his erstwhile co-religionists, I have by no means cited the document at second hand, without having had the patience to consult the trial records directly. In my fifth chapter, in fact, the text edited by Quaglioni, with the relative discussion, is amply reported verbatim[33].

My book has been much criticised for its depiction of the troubled relationship between the Italian Jews and the Ashkenazi and their cultural and religious world. Yet these criticisms have deliberately ignored the persuasive account by Israel Yuval, according to which the virulent anti-Christianism of these German Jewish communities was their distinctive feature. Indeed, an entirely positive portrayal of the late-medieval Ashkenazi world strikes me as artificial and unconvincing, as does the unjustified belief in the existence of pastoral relationships between Italian

Jews and immigrant Ashkenazi. A serious historian like Isaia Sonne, an expert on the Jewish reality in Italy of the Middle Ages and the early Modern Age, has long since debunked this legend, devoid of any meaningful documentation to support it.

Yoseph Ha-Cohen (Giuseppe Sacerdoti da Voltaggio), the foremost Jewish chronicler of sixteenth-century Italy, assumed in his writings a markedly hostile attitude towards the Jews of Germanic origin, whom he blamed for innumerable wrongdoings, among them that of being the direct cause of numerous expulsions and even the burning of Jewish books. Sonne explained the reasons for the chronicler's attitude, which he maintained was paradigmatic of the relationships between Italian Jews and the Ashkenazi.

> Yoseph Ha-Cohen takes pains to stress that the German Jews, with their wickedness of mind and behaviour (*sic*), were the cause of the crisis in relations between the Jews and the surrounding society in Italy. The attitude of the Italian Jews, particularly those of Sephardic origin, towards the Ashkenazi was similar to that of the Italians towards the uneducated German barbarians. Whenever Yoseph Ha-Cohen directs his accusations against the Ashkenazi, he is careful to specify the Jewish sources from which he has drawn his information [...] almost as if to forestall the accusation that he has used the propaganda of the anti-Semites. For this reason, he has his claims corroborated by Jewish witnesses above all suspicion.
>
> Elsewhere we come across rare sources and Jewish documents relative to facts and events that were to be disclosed only to few persons, because to a large extent, it seems, they were liable to feed the propaganda of the anti-Semites. It is for this reason that they have been deliberately consigned to oblivion by the official historians of our people. For the opposite reason, these accounts have been preserved in the non-Jewish documentation. Among Jews, reports of these facts have been handed down across the generations to only the select few, who have made use of them when they deem it opportune.

Isaia Sonne wrote these notes in volume no. XXII of the *Hebrew Union College Annual* issued in Cincinnati in 1949. In 1954 he republished them in Jerusalem as an appendix to his classic essay on the Jews of Italy during the age of the Counter-Reformation, *From Paulus IV to Pius V*. His instructive finding is that, already in the sixteenth century, the Jews practised rigid self-censorship in their accounts of Jewish history, erasing or omitting facts and events that might tarnish the image of the Jewish people which they wished to leave for posterity. The in-

tention, quite rightly, was to ensure that the Jews themselves did not furnish the anti-Semites with further and effective weapons for their evil designs. The *cui prodest* criterion therefore also applied in the writing of the history of the Jews, and official Jewish historiography complied rigidly with this precautionary principle.

The blood. Myths or rites?

As well known, the biblical prohibition on the consumption of blood is absolute and peremptory (Lev. 17, 10-12, Deut., 23-25 etc.). Jewish ritual, *halakhah*, from the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*, then brought the prohibition under a rigid and detailed set of rules designed to prevent even inadvertent breach of the provision, which is considered one of the foundations of Jewish identity. The accusation by the Trent judges that the Jews made use of blood, that they consumed it during the Passover supper, and that they committed ritual infanticides to obtain it, thus appear utterly baseless, a detestable calumny against those who had been branded as irremediably guilty from the outset. Many scholars have willingly accepted this conclusion, which spares them from awkward and difficult investigations into the matter.

Piero Camporesi, in an excellent study of twenty years ago ((*Il sugo della vita. Simbolismo e magia del sangue*, Milan, 1988), illustrated how in popular medicine blood, and the blood of children especially, was an indispensable or important ingredient in the preparation of ointments, salves, electuaries, and magic philtres of well-tested efficacy. The most expert chemists knew how to carefully prepare and treat blood so that it could fully manifest its admirable therapeutic qualities. Allegedly, young blood, ingested in the correct doses, was an infallible means to rejuvenate the body.

I have tried in my book to show that magic, popular medicine, superstition and alchemy slowly but profoundly spread from Christian society to broad sections – certainly the least educated ones – of the Ashkenazi community (to which the Jews of Trent belonged), circumventing or flouting even the strictest norms of Jewish ritual, above all the blood prohibition[34]. At the heart of the West, therefore, Christians and Jews unhesitatingly

consumed animal and human blood, cooked, dried and reduced to powder, to which they attributed extraordinary magical powers, both exorcistic and therapeutic. What to us today appears repellent, at that time was irresistibly attractive. Likewise, the use of oils and balms extracted from fetid mummified corpses, medicaments made from the powdered skulls of hanged men, unguents and ointments manufactured from human fat, found no impediment in practice against their use, neither among the Christians nor among the Jews.

In light of the pioneering research on the matter by Daniel Sperber (*Minhaghe' Israel*, "The Customs of the Jewish People", Jerusalem, 1991), I have reached the conclusion that, as regards German Judaism, long-standing customs were often able to avoid, and sometimes completely to nullify, the biblical and talmudic rules. The rabbis were therefore forced, *a posteriori* and sometimes reluctantly, to come to terms with a phenomenon of which they disapproved and seek to mitigate its disruptive consequences[35].

The *segullot* – secret formularies of remedies and medicaments compiled and circulated by experts on the practical *Kabbalah* in the Middle Ages and the early Modern Age – contained a wide array of blood-based recipes used for haemostasis and oral transfusions, and whose magical and therapeutic efficacy was taken for granted. In the lists of '*secrets*' compiled by Elia Loans, the *Baal Shem* of Worms, Shabbatai Lipshütz, Sacharja Plongiany Simoner, and by many other Ashkenazi spagyricists, dried young human blood was used as an astringent powder with extraordinary curative powers when applied to the circumcision wound. Ibex blood was prescribed to cure epilepsy; in which case also recommended was a virgin's menstrual blood dried and dissolved in wine. Rabbit's blood served to induce pregnancy, while again the menstrual blood of young girls staunched excessive menstrual flow[36]. Love philtres were prepared with human blood extracted from the suitor's little finger, dissolved in wine and administered to the woman resisting courtship.

It has been objected that the texts of the *segullot* cited in my book date to a period later than that of the Trent trials, i.e. to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; while the ritual responses cited among my sources, though originating from the same geographical area, are datable to the eighteenth century. Yet those with the slightest familiarity with such formularies of popular medicine know that the same recipes were repeated unchanged

over time (and for centuries). Evident proof of this is provided by the use of the powdered blood of children (mainly Jewish, not Christians) as an effective haemostatic for the circumcision wound. Such use was recommended by the *segullot* formularies of the *Baal Shem* of Worms, Lipshütz and Simoner, and it was already being widely adopted in the Ashkenazi communities of the fifteenth century (both in Germany and Italy) – as for that matter stated by the accused of Trent, in testimonies which can be regarded as entirely credible. It therefore not surprising to find that large part of these ancient recipes (rarely those involving the use of blood) are still today re-published in Israel for a specific, but by no means restricted, public. This is a substantial sector of the population (often tending towards extreme orthodoxy, but not always) for whom long-standing superstitions and faith in the empirical remedies of the *Kabbalah* are still of considerable importance. As regards the ritual responses, their authors, among them Jacob Reischer of Prague (1670-1734), cited the custom practised since time immemorial in the Germanic lands in order that the oral ingestion of blood (in this case animal blood) could be permitted for therapeutic purposes, also in the case of less serious illness. Indeed, the usage came to be declared outright *minhagh Israel* (that is, a "Jewish custom consolidated in time") with validity even if it conflicted with the precept of the Torah[37].

As said, the rabbis were forced, often willy-nilly and *a posteriori*, to accept a practice that clashed with religious rules. Knowing that they could not change a deeply-rooted custom, they chose the only option available to them: that of limiting the consequences of a blatant violation of the dictates of the Torah. To do so, they decided to allow only, and in minimal quantities, the consumption of blood after it had been dried and drained of all dietary connotations ("when it has been dried to the point of its transformation into almost a piece of wood, all moisture having been eliminated therefrom")[38]. The Jewish blood merchants, who, like their Christian colleagues, travelled the roads of Europe with their waxed saddle bags containing dried blood, gave their customers a rabbinic certificate (*kasherut*) guaranteeing that the product was completely desiccated and no longer belonged to the category of food. The powdered blood could therefore be used throughout the year for curative or magical purposes, as seen fit, with no fear of violating any rabbinical interdict. In the

case of ointments and syrups concocted from mummified bodies, the rabbis obviously allowed their use when the raw material had been extracted from the corpses of gentiles, not of Jews[39]. Hence, Israel of Brandenburg did not stray far from the truth in his deposition before the judges of Trent, when he declared that the consumption of blood was permitted only if it was the blood of non-Jews[40].

Another – apparently decisive – objection raised by my severe and meticulous critics is that the texts which I have cited deal with animal and not human blood, which casts serious doubt on the importance and relevance of the Jewish documents in question. If the ingestion of animal blood was generally forbidden and allowed only for therapeutic purposes, the prohibition applied *a fortiori* to the case of human blood. The passage from the blood of the animals to that of humans is thus entirely arbitrary and contrary to logic.

Besides the fact that, as my study has shown in detail, the formularies of empirical remedies and the Ashkenazi *segullot* comprised numerous recipes based on young blood and menstrual blood, to be administered dried and dissolved in wine, it is that '*a fortiori*' that leaves me somewhat perplexed, for it demonstrates the absolute unfamiliarity of my critics with the Jewish ritualistic texts. In fact, the prohibition on consuming animal blood was a great deal more stringent than the ban on human blood. It is written in the Torah (Lev. 7, 26) that "you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwellings". From this the ritualists have deduced that, whilst the prohibition on animal blood was considered a negative precept (*lo ta'aseh*) directly prescribed by the Torah, the ban on human blood belonged in the category of the affirmative precepts (*'aseh*), of lesser gravity, established by the rabbis. This is the opinion of Maimonides. The celebrated French exegetist *Rashì* (R. Shelomoh Izchaki), who lived at Troyes in the eleventh century, explained that the only reason for the ban on ingesting human blood was that it might be erroneously exchanged with the animal blood prohibited by the Torah. The followers of *Rashì*, the Franco-German Tossafists, even went so far as to allow the consumption of human blood if it was evident and verified that it was not animal blood[41]. Entirely coherent with these premises, therefore, was the confession made to the Trent judges by Lazzaro da Serravalle, for whom the biblical prohibi-

tion on blood concerned only that of animals (*quod lex Dei [...] loquitur de sanguine bestiarum*)[42].

In a forthcoming essay on the subject, Rabbi Elkana Hildesheimer, on the basis of these and other data drawn from the rabbinic texts, concludes that:

> the Ashkenazi, like other Jews, ate foods not permitted by the rite, sometimes requesting and obtaining dubious rabbinical dispensations. This also held in the case of blood, when the ban on consuming human blood was treated with a laxity certainly greater than that shown towards the blood of animals and birds. Not only was the consumption of human blood less repellent than it seems to us today, but not infrequently also the rabbis were forced to admit its consumption[43].

Numerous and reliable Jewish testimonies on the ingestion of animal and human blood to cure the soul and the body consequently corroborate the confessions made on the matter by the Jews accused in Trent. But it is a long, and anything but automatic, step from the therapeutic and even magical and alchemic use of blood to its transformation into the central symbol of Passover ceremonies tied to alleged ritual murders. We may immediately dismiss the hypothesis, even if only theoretical, that the Jews (in Trento or elsewhere) committed atrocious crimes to obtain the blood of a Christian infant and celebrate the Passover rites. At the same time we may also do away with the apparently linked assumption that, once we have rejected the stereotype of the ritual murder, we must perforce conclude that the Jews did not use human blood during the Passover ritual. And here I refer to those Jews, animated by an ardent, visceral, and justified hatred for Christianity and its representatives (the Edom of the sacred texts) guilty of indiscriminate massacres, forced baptisms, and abductions of Jewish children.

As we have seen, those Ashkenazi Jews had transformed the central meaning of the Passover *Haggadah* into a vision of vengeance on Edom – Christianity – heir to the perfidious Pharaoh, and of redemption constructed by God upon its ruins. Besides the liturgical invocation of Ashkenazi origin for the God of Israel (*shefokh*) to pour down his wrath upon the peoples that did not recognize him, and destroy them, Israel Yuval has reconstructed 'the ritual of curses' with which these extremist fringe groups accompanied recitation of the ten plagues of Egypt, opening with *dam*, the word that meant 'blood'. The rabbi Shalom from

Wiener Neustadt, as well as the already-cited Maharil, stressed the anti-Christian meaning of the sprinkling of wine on the table during recital of the plagues of Egypt, which made the 'ritual of curses' a ceremony peculiar to extremist Jewish groups of the Ashkenazi diaspora.

> When the ten plagues of Egypt are named, each time the finger is dipped into the cup of wine standing before (the head of household), who pours a little onto the table [...] and intones "From these curses may God save us". The reason is that the four cups of wine (which must be drunk during the recitation of the *Haggadah*) augur salvation for the Jews and damnation for the nations of the world. Therefore (the head of household) spills wine from the glass with his finger, thus signifying that we Jews shall be saved from those curses, which shall instead be visited upon others[44].

The rite is explained in the *Rokeach*: "wine is sprinkled towards the outside (on the table) in correspondence to the sixteen faces of the avenging sword of God"[45]. The accused in the Trento trial, who practised the ritual of curses, confessed under torture that, before its recitation, the master of the house opened the glass vial containing dried human blood ("blood of a Christian child" they specified, or rather the judges dictated) and dropped a pinch of it into the cup containing the wine. He then poured the wine onto the table, reciting the list of the ten curses against Edom, the Christians. Finally, without drinking the wine, he poured the remainder of it into a basin or into a cracked earthenware pot, and threw it away.

My hypothesis is that, whereas the specific statement in the confessions that the blood had been taken from a Christian child – presumably sacrificed for the purpose – is a blatant interpolation by the judges intent on proving the guilt of the Jews, the first part of the description (relative to the use of Christian blood during the Passover supper) is not at all improbable. As the curses were recited, for the head of the household to dissolve some grains of powdered Christian blood in the wine (the same dried blood which served numerous other therapeutic and propitiatory purposes during the year) was to symbolically transform the contents of the wine glass into the blood of Edom. This gesture would have given potency to the curses, conferring them wondrous efficacy, and reinvigorated the terrible curses which, as Yuval has written, "constituted *per se* a destructive magic born from a violent and

aggressive messianism"[46]. Then the wine, transformed into the blood of the pernicious and accursed Edom was sprinkled on the table and the remainder thrown on the rubbish tip, or into the street, without being drunk by the diners.

The procedure was no different – although of diverse significance – from the ceremony of the circumcision wine as recently interpreted by Lawrence A. Hoffman. During the ceremony of the *milah*, some drops of the circumcised child's blood mixed with the wine had the power to turn the latter into blood. It was then (unlike the blood of the *Pesach* curses) given to drink to the child, his mother and the circumciser, with propitiatory and beneficent significance[47]. If there is some basis of truth, or at least plausibility, to my hypothesis concerning the blood accusation – that the Jews used Christian blood at Passover – then we are dealing with rites, and not myths, performed in the Middle Ages, on both sides of the Alps, by a minority of Jews of German origin. In other words, whilst the ritual murder was and remains a myth, the use of blood in the Passover liturgy of curses against the Christians was, as I have sought to show, an idiosyncratic and deviant rite practised by fringe Ashkenazi extremists.

As we have seen, rather than endeavouring in vain to eradicate a ritual of which they disapproved, the Ashkenazi rabbis sought to limit its diffusion and consequences, while awaiting better times (which eventually came). Some of them (David Tebel Sprinz of Bamberg, Moshe *Jodenmeister* of Halle and Shimon Katz of Frankfurt-on-Maine are mentioned in the confessions of the accused of Trento) pressed for less affluent Jews and those without family dependants to be exonerated from the problematic ritual of the curses and the blood. They also recommended that no more than a minute quantity of dried blood, the size of a lentil, should be dissolved in the wine (which in any case was not to be drunk). Once again, practice prevailed over the norm in Jewish behaviour, and the rabbis restricted their efforts to saving the saveable, or else turned a blind eye.

It seems superfluous to point out that there was no relationship whatsoever – neither coincidental nor consequential – between the so-called 'ritual of blood and curses' performed by these Jews on the first two evenings of the Passover and ritual infanticide, notwithstanding the judges' efforts to insinuate its existence. In the rural reality of mediaeval Germany, where everyday life was

suffused with alchemical and magical fantasies, Jewish households, like Christian ones, often had an oilcloth pouch or vial of blood (preferably young, coagulated or dried) recommended for use in diverse eventualities, true or imaginary, and not solely for the treatment of physical illnesses. Thos who 'donated' that blood (always upon payment) were alive and flourishing when they did so, and they belonged to indigent families in search of easy earnings.

As Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia has stressed (*The Myth of Ritual Murder. Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*, New Haven, Conn., 1988) "for an impoverished father, for those in need of money like him, blood, even of his own child, was a product like any other to sell". On very rare occasions, a father, in a clumsy attempt to extract blood from the carotid artery, would accidentally provoke the death of his child. In such cases the tragic accident was followed by exemplary punishment of the culprit, despite the involuntary nature of the act[48].

Hebrew

The confessions of the accused of Trent sometimes contain phrases in Hebrew uttered in Ashkenazi pronunciation which the trial notaries transliterated with numerous errors and inaccuracies. In my book I have reconstructed them for the first time, finding that they were often instances of known anti-Christian invective, and sometimes unusual and hitherto unknown liturgical formulas, which, according to those Jews, accompanied rites which had to do with the blood accusation. There follows a significant sample: "Thus may our enemies be destroyed"; "the hanged man, Jesus the heretic"; "in contempt and shame of the hanged Jesus, and may this befall all our enemies"; "you have been crucified and pierced like Jesus the hanged, in ignominy and shame like Jesus"[49].

As will be seen, these phrases in Hebrew raise a number of unavoidable problems relative to the intention that they expressed, and to the context in which they were allegedly uttered. Whoever heard them and transcribed them could not have known Hebrew; for otherwise he would not have rendered them almost incomprehensible by riddling them with errors. For the same reason, I do not give credence to the suggestion that an

apostate (perhaps the former Ashkenazi Jew Giovanni da Feltre) had furnished skewed counsel on this point to the judges so that the confessions extracted under torture might be more credible[50]. In this case, the texts would have been transcribed correctly or comprehensibly.

Moreover, that the judges and notaries of the Trent trials were ignorant of both Hebrew and Yiddish is demonstrated by the fact that a number of letters exchanged among Jewish families of northern Italy were transcribed with numerous errors and attached to the trial records. The content of these letters must have been obscure to the Trent judges; otherwise they would have realized that they starkly contradicted what they were so vehemently seeking to prove. In fact, the writers of the letters in Yiddish bewailed the unspeakable sufferings of the Jews of Regensburg "victims, like those of Trent, of the ignoble calumny of ritual infanticide"[51]. For at Regensburg, in 1476 another trial on the blood accusation had begun as a corollary to the one in Trento. The expert assistance of a converted Jew, with a command of Hebrew and Yiddish, would have persuaded Hinderbach, the prince-bishop, to discard those letters, and thereby spare himself embarrassment. It is precisely the fact that judges and notaries could neither understand nor correctly transcribe those phrases, pronounced in Hebrew or in Yiddish, suggests that they were authentic and not deliberately interpolated.

Unless there is other evidence to show that those expressions did not constitute an intact fragment of the culture of the Trento accused, but something else instead, the problem persists; and it has numerous implications. I am not surprised, therefore, that only in rare cases has this problem been sincerely and directly addressed[52]; instead, it has all too often been glossed over. Now, in this rejoinder, I shall again propose it without ambiguities and circumlocutions. A problem such as this, which I believe to be of prime importance, cannot be resolved without serious and credible instruments.

Moreover, I have serious doubts that the tools employed by historians of law – experts on the Latin primary texts[53] but wholly unfamiliar with Judaism and Jewish sources – are sufficient to construe the confessions of the Jews indicted in Trento. Knowledge of such sources, in fact, would have averted the error of mistaking for pseudo-Hebraic and satanic language, invented extempore by the judges, what were in fact anti-Christian formulas

and curses long present in the synagogual liturgy of a minority group in the German Judaism of that time. The sterile endeavour to study the Jews without knowing Hebrew is like studying Roman law without knowing Latin, or investigating the mentality of the Italians while merely visiting Italy as a tourist with no understanding the language. For historians of anti-Semitism this seems to be the obligatory route, at the end of which many Jews discern the possibility of acquiring an identity well accepted by those who matter.

Anti-Semitic prejudice: the passive and resigned Jew

In my book, I have sought to dispel another myth: that of the Jew as the sacrificial victim, defensive and passive, and wholly resigned to his tragic fate. As we have seen, in response to the ferocious persecutions which had stained the valleys of the Rhine and the Maine with blood during the Crusades – but also in the following centuries as a reaction to their Christian persecutors who wielded the cross as a weapon of oppression and violence – certain fringes of Ashkenazi Jews developed a virulent and unyielding anti-Christianism expressed, largely verbally, as vicious contempt, corrosive abuse, and liturgical invective. Furthermore, at least some of the German Jews did not resign themselves to Christian oppression; they were instead prepared to take revenge, with or without God's help. The forces ranged against each other were unequal, of course; but this did not discourage the persecuted Jews, even though they knew that the conflict's outcome was a foregone conclusion.

Some years ago, a researcher and palaeographer at the University of Tel Aviv, Philippe Ben Natan, wrote a long essay in Hebrew entitled "Blood Accusations, Murders and Politics in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: The Causes and Circumstances". Ben Natan's thesis was well documented and certainly controversial.

The fact that the bloody onslaught against the Jewish communities had sometimes provoked significant reaction made it plain to the Christian persecutors (or those about to become such) inhabiting the Rhine Valley and the surrounding territories that the revenge of the Jews was imminent. The derision and searing invective of the victims at the moment of their massacre, together with the curses of the survivors and their descend-

ants in subsequent generations, left no doubt as to their determination to wreak vengeance on the alien and oppressive society that surrounded them [...]. Perhaps only still unclear, regarding the image of the Jews and their vengeance, was how ferocious their vengeance would be. Did the Christians perhaps share modern beliefs concerning Jewish sensitivity and piety? [...] Did the Christian persecutors perhaps have reason to believe that the Jews, in exacting their revenge, would show compassion towards them? [...] Could the Christians have hoped that the Jewish vengeance would not be relentless and unbearably cruel, and would not be unleashed against innocent victims as well? Judging from testimonies drawn from Jewish sources originating among the pietists of Germany and northern France, and brought to light by Jacob Katz some forty years ago, one has serious doubts that these questions can be answered in the affirmative. And such doubts are strengthened by the evidence on lesser-known social and moral features of the Ashkenazi Jewish community which have been uncovered in recent years; evidence which reveals that a substantial number of Jews engaged in criminal activities.

[...] The conclusion that we may draw, in light of the relationship with the circumstances, is that the blood libel was predictable. Moreover, that relationship suggests that the spread of the blood libel was inevitable.

These highly contentious hypotheses advanced by Ben Natan precluded publication of his essay in the Israeli historical journals, even though it had been refereed and approved by reputable scholars. This, though, is hardly surprising[54].

Again recently, Michael Barilan, lecturer in the history of medicine at the University of Tel Aviv (as well as grandson of the founder of the Bar Ilan University), has wondered why "Jewish historians, while they feel perfectly at ease in revealing monstrosities and criminal acts, real or alleged, perpetrated by medieval European civilization, appear loath to accept any theory which postulates, even merely by hypothesis, the participation in crimes by the Jews of the Middle Ages, amid a Jewish environment imbued with magic and superstition"[55].

It is highly likely that the extremist groups that I have mentioned – which conducted their Jewish festivals to commemorate the tragedies which they had witnessed, or which had been handed down to them by memory – comprised crazed delinquents capable of savage killing rituals. Bernard Lazare, James Frazer, Cecil Roth and Elliot Horowitz have, at different times, hypothesised or sustained the reality of this phenomenon on the basis of heterogeneous documentation which links it also to heterodox and eccentric celebrations of the *Purim* carnival[56].

Michael Pellivert stresses that this is not to accuse the Jewish people as a whole, but rather to accept an long-established matter of fact: namely, that there has never existed a people which has not had its monsters[57]. Apparently of similar opinion is Umberto Eco, who has written a note on the issue: "The matter does not particularly perturb me, because in the course of the centuries there have always been personages, of concern more to the history of psychiatry than to that of religion, who have dedicated themselves to satanic cults of various sorts; [...]; it is therefore likely that Jewish criminal maniacs have existed as well"[58].

In *Pasque di Sangue* I have certainly not sought to deny the differences between tormentors and tormented, nor to reverse their roles. Rather, I have tried to show that those Ashkenazi Jews, having survived the traumas of massacres and forced baptisms, were determined to be no longer defenceless and pitiful holocaust victims. This resolve to resist and to react was conveyed into their harshly anti-Christian liturgy and rituals; and these also comprised, I believe, the magical and maleficent use of blood. But certainly not ritual murder, which remained an entirely Christian stereotype. But in this dialogue between persecutors and persecuted, also the Jews had a voice; and it was not always a voice smothered by tears.

> If anti-Semitism, if anti-Semitic stereotypes can live in the historiographical narrative, in the mental reconstruction of historians, as a history in and of itself; if indeed one can imagine the growth of a 'reservoir', of a solidified, largely self-contained, stratified 'glacier' of stereotypes, and therefore of places of memory from which the terms of the polemic are extracted as though they were crystallizations or archaeological finds: then one will have ceased to interpret the accusations against the Jews as a problem of communication between Jews and Christians which can give the Jews an opportunity to speak, and on the contrary one will have identified, from the beginning of the inquiry, Jews as subjects without a voice, as victims immobilized in their destiny of suffering[59].

I entirely agree with this argument. And I therefore refuse to be consigned to the 'glacier' of anti-Semitic stereotypes, being told "what should be at the centre of a book on the theme of ritual murder: namely, Christian theological and narrative elaboration since the second and third centuries [...] of the myth of the destructive aggressiveness of a people that did not belong to the

society of Christians"[60]. I firmly believe, in fact, that the history of anti-Semitism is not the only practicable road to travel, side by side with the usual fellow-travellers in whose eyes the Jews have reason to exist only as perpetually passive victims.

A last consideration that I sought to emphasise in my book was that the principles of Judaism do not always coincide with the real behaviours of Jews in flesh and blood; and that the practice – duly contextualized – often conflicts with the theory. However, the understandable pain of the rabbis in face of this sad truth should not induce us to emulate them by idealizing the reality, pretending that it faithfully reflects ideology and the norm. Writing about the history of the Jews is not like composing a sinagogual sermon with a battery of notes. Nor is it to celebrate always and inevitably the saints and martyrs of our people[61]. For this reason, the work of historians is always difficult, and sometimes painful and thankless.

Endnotes

[1] Y.H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, Parma, 1983, p. 107.

[2] See on this the discussions by S. Luzzatto, "La storia divisa", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 February 2007; A. De Vincentiis, "Nella natura delle accuse il punto dolente della polemica", *Il Manifesto*, 4 March 2007; R. De Mattei, "Ha ragione Ariel Toaff. Anche la tortura fa storia", *Libero*, 4 March 2007; F. Cardini, "Una vicenda editoriale che deve far riflettere", *Toscana Oggi*, 25 March 2007.

[3] Baer's romanticized account has been resumed by Haim Beinart, who places complete trust in inquisitional documents on the tight-knit network of the Marranos communities and their enduring faith in Judaism (see H. Beinart, "The Records of the Inquisition. A Source of Jewish and Converso History", in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities*, II, 1967, no. 11; Id., "La Inquisición y el problema de los conversos hasta 1492", in *La vida judía en Sefarad*, Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid, 1992, pp. 43-62). On this stereotyped and nostalgic reconstruction of the religious life and aspirations of the *Conversos* propounded by Baer, Beinart and large part of modern Jewish historiogaphy, see the intelligent critique by Herman P. Salomon in the preface to the 4th edn. of the celebrated *A History of the Marranos* by Cecil Roth (New York, 1974).

[4] See in particular the recent edition of the book in English by H.P. Salomon and I.S.D. Sassoon: A.J. Saraiva, *The Marrano Factory. The Portuguese Inquisition and Its New Christians*, Leiden, 2001.

[5] On this polemic see in particular A.B. Lorence, "The Inquisition and the New Christians in the Iberian Peninsula. Main Historiographic Issues and

Controversies", in *The Sepharadi and Oriental Jewish Heritage*, Jerusalem, 1982, pp. 13-72; D.M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit. The Religion of Crypto-Jews*, Philadelphia (Pa.), 1996. See also the recent fine book by N. Wachtel, *La foi du souvenir. Labyrinthes marranes*, Paris, 2001, and the excellent introduction by C.B. Stuczynski to the Hebrew edn. of S. Schwarz, *The New-Christians in Portugal in the 20th Century*, Jerusalem, 2005.

[6] In regard to the reactions to my book and the contradictory methodological attitudes of Israeli historiography, see the important article recently published by Yair Barak ("Mahalakh ben ha-tippot" [A path among the drops], *Ha-Aretz*, 2 April 2007).

[7] See A. Foa, "Riti di sangue e accuse infondate", *la Repubblica*, 8 February 2007; "I pericoli di un metodo analogico", *Storicamente*, 18 March 2007.

[8] The discussion of this issue by De Vincentiis (*Nella natura delle accuse il punto dolente della polemica*, cit.) strikes me as particularly relevant.

[9] See A. Prosperi, "Inquisizioni cristiane ed ebrei", in *Atti dei Convegni Lincei n. 191: Le Inquisizioni cristiane e gli ebrei*, Rome, 2003, pp. 7-28; Id., "L'Inquisizione romana e gli ebrei", in M. Luzzati (ed.), *L'Inquisizione e gli ebrei in Italia*, Bari, 1994, pp. 67-120.

[10] See on this F. Cardini, *Pasque di sangue. Il coraggio della storia*, cit.; Id., "Storici, il paradigma censurato", *L'Avvenire*, 28 February 2007; Id., "Una vicenda editoriale che deve far riflettere", cit.

[11] See A. Cavaglion, "Iniziato male, finito peggio. Sul caso Toaff", *Lo Straniero*, 6 March 2007.

[12] See C. Ginzburg, "Pasque di sangue e sabba, miti ma non riti", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 23 February 2007.

[13] This is what the zealous lawyer Massimo Introvigne ("Il caso Toaff. Torna l'accusa di sangue contro gli ebrei", *Il Giornale*, 12 February 2007) believes that he has demonstrated. Introvigne writes with ill-concealed malice in his review that "Toaff's thesis is nothing other than the 'Murray heresy' revised and applied to the blood accusation", concluding with the predictable reference to witchcraft trials: "one would also have to admit that the witches went to meet the devil astride their broomsticks".

[14] *Rokeach*, Ms. Hebr. Bodleian, Oxford, no. 1103. See also J. Mulin Segal (*Maharil*), *Sefer ha-minhaghim. The Book of the Customs*, edited by Sh. Spitzer, Jerusalem, 1989, pp. 144-5; I. Ta-Shma in *Efraim Talmage Memorial Volume*, edited by D. Walfish, Haifa, 1993, pp. 85-98.

[15] See I. Yuval, *'Two Nations in Your Womb'. Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Tel Aviv, 2000, pp. 144-5. My loyal yet critical friend, Gadi Luzzatto Voghera ("Un libro scomodo", in *Laboratorio Alfa*, 14 February 2007) reproaches me for claiming that, in the collective mentality of these Ashkenazi Jews, "the Passover *Seder* had for some time been changed into a celebration in which the desire for the redemption of the people of Israel sprang from an aspiration to vengeance against the Christian persecutors, and from their malediction", judging it "apodictic and imprudent". I believe that this criticism can be rebutted in light of Yuval's corroborated studies on the matter.

[16] See R. Di Segni, "Due nuove fonti sulle '*Toledot Jeshu*'", *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, LV (1989), pp. 131-2.

[17] I therefore dispute the misjudged remark by Kenneth Stow ("A Book Full of Sound and Fury", in *Storicamente*, 18 March 2007) that the *Toledot Yeshu* "is an old text, the motifs, hardly flattering, were possibly in place over a millennium before Trent, nor was the book of a necessarily Ashkenazi origin". In fact, it is well-established that the motif of the Virgin impregnated during her menstrual period first appeared in the German manuscripts of the *Toledot Yeshu* produced in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

[18] See R. Po-Chia Hsia, "The Truth About Trent", *Ha-Aretz*, 16 February 2007: "During a November 2 interrogation, Israel, hanging on the rack, denounced the Christian faith [...]. Here, at last, is the kernel of truth in professor Toaff's convoluted argument: torture creates hatred!".

[19] See A. Shear, "Miscellany", in *Tea, Lemon, Old Books*, 5 March 2007.

[20] See *supra*, p. 249 [234]. Henceforth, references to the text are accompanied by indication in brackets of the corresponding pages in the first edition of *Pasque di sangue*.

[21] I regard as unjustified the criticisms brought against me on this point by Nicola Cusumano ("Ebrei e accuse di omicidio rituale: in margine a un libro di Ariel Toaff", in *Mediterranea. Ricerche Storiche*, IV, April 2007, pp. 141-52), who seems to claim that the use of (accurate) transcriptions of the trial documents is tantamount to endorsing Bonelli's anti-Semitism.

[22] See D. Quaglioni and A. Esposito, *Processi contro gli ebrei di Trent (1475-1478)*. I: *I processi del 1475*, Padua, 1990, p. 5.

[23] See F. Parente, "Il confronto ideologico tra l'ebraismo e la Chiesa in Italia", in *Italia Judaica*, I (1983), pp. 354-7.

[24] See K. Stow, "A Book Full of Sound and Fury", cit.; D. Abulafia, "Blood Libels Are Back", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 28 February 2007; A. Prosperi, "E l'ebreo torturato confessa", *La Repubblica*, 10 February 2007.

[25] See R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Trent 1475. A Ritual Murder Trial*, New Haven (Conn.), 1992, pp. 92-3.

[26] See. M. Rubin, *Gentile Tales. The Narrative Assault on the Late Medieval Jews*, New Haven (Conn.), 1999, pp. 190-5.

[27] See Foa, *Riti di sangue e accuse infondate*, cit.; Ead., *I pericoli di un metodo analogico*, cit.

[28] See *supra*, pp. 77-78 [75-76].

[29] Starting with the phenomenon, not of suicides but the killing of children and disciples "for sanctification of God's name", that is, to prevent forced baptism, and in obvious conflict with the *Torah*'s prohibition on murder, H. Soloveitchik (*Pawnbroking. A Study in the Inter-Relationship between Halakhah, Economic Activity and Communal Self-Image*, Jerusalem, 1985, p. 111). See also *supra*, pp. 108-109 [105-106].

[30] See e.g. G. Busi, "Brutte sorprese a Pasqua", *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 11 February 2007; R. Weinstein, "A Blood-Stained Version of History", *Ha-Aretz*, 8 March 2007; Id., "Un'occasione perduta", *Storicamente*, 18 March 2007.

[31] See Prosperi, "E l'ebreo torturato confessa", cit.

[32] See *supra*, pp. 61-62 [59-60].

[33] See *supra*, ch. V. See in particular note 16, p. 258.

[34] See on this chap. VI ("Magical and Therapeutic Blood").

[35] D. Sperber *(Minhaghe' Israel*, pp. 59-65), drawing on previous studies by H. Pollack (*Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands, 1648-1806*, Cambridge, 1971) and H.J. Zimmels (*Magicians, Theologians and Doctors*, London, 1952), paints a picture very similar to mine of the popular Jewish culture in Germany, and cites a broad range of texts on the widespread use of animal blood and mummified human bodies for therapeutic purposes.

[36] As David Abulafia and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera have rightly pointed out, one cannot exclude that ointments and syrups with purportedly astounding therapeutic and magical effects, and with exotic and fantastic names (dragon blood, tiger balm), sometimes contained homely ingredients and were merely malodorous fakes.

[37] I believe that on this point I have met the objections of Ruggero Taradel ("L'accusa di sangue tra storia e leggenda", *Morashah*, 15 February 2007), a scholar whom I admire and whose authoritative studies concern the period following to the one covered by my book.

[38] On the dispensation for the consumption of "cooked blood", whose structure had been radically modified, besides the sources already cited in my *Pasque di Sangue*, see Y. Engel, Commentary on *Talmud, Menachot* 21a; I. Meir, *Responsa, Yoreh De'ah*, sec. 11, Tel Aviv, 1961, pp. 27-32. I thank rabbi Menachem Sreter of Jerusalem for kindly bringing these texts to my attention (written communication of 7 April 2007).

[39] See Sperber, *Minhaghe' Israel*, p. 61.

[40] See *supra*, p. 105 [104].

[41] R. S. Izchaki (*Rashi*) comm. a *Talmud, Ketubot*, par. 1; *Tossafot* a *Talmud, Keritot* 21b.

[42] See *supra*, p. 107 [104].

[43] E. Hildesheimer, "Consuming Forbidden Foods without Danger to Life". The essay was written as part of a Graduate Seminar on the theme of ritual murders at the department of Jewish History of Bar Ilan University.

[44] See *supra*, pp. 169-175 [166-171]; Yuval, "Two Nations in Your Womb", pp. 116-17.

[45] See N. Coronel, "Chamishah kuntresim", *Cinque fascicoli*, Vienna, 1864, c. 27a.

[46] Yuval, "Two Nations in Your Womb", p. 145.

[47] See L.A. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood. Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism*, Chicago (Ill.), 1996, pp. 96-135; see. *supra*, pp. 150-151, 186-188 [146-147].

[48] Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, cit., pp. 92-4.

[49] "*Ken ikkaretù kol oyevenu"; "talui Yeshu ha-min»; «le-cherpah we-liklimah la-talui Yeshu, kach yihye' le-chol soneenu"; "atta nizlavtà we-nidkartà ke-Yeshu ha-talui le-boshet we-liklimah ke-Yeshu*". Cf. *supra*, pp. 203-204 [195-196].

[50] See Busi, "Brutte sorprese a Pasqua", cit.

[51] See *supra*, pp. 85-86, 236 [83-84]. These letters are about to be published in transcription by Boris Kotlerman, of the Department of Yiddish Studies, Bar Ilan University.

[52] See. M.G. Muzzarelli, "La cultura dei perseguitati. A proposito di Pasque di sangue", *La Nazione*, 12 February 2007.

[53] See. A. Esposito and D. Quaglioni, "Pasque di sangue. Le due facce del pregiudizio", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 11 February 2007.

[54] I thank Philippe Ben Natan for making his text available to me and for giving me permission to make free use of it. The essay was discussed by Professors Israel Yuval of the University of Jerusalem, Avi Gross of the Ben Gurion University of Be'er Sheva, and Simon Schwarzfuchs of Bar Ilan University.

[55] See. M. Barilan, "On Ritual Murders Then and Now", in *Ynet*, 16 February 2007. The same author has recently advanced an interesting hypothesis concerning the origin of the blood accusation which is also based on Jewish custom: in this case, the diffusion in medieval Jewish society of embryotomy, an operation judged morally dubious (see M. Barilan, "Abortion in Jewish Religious Law: Neighborly Love, Imago Dei the and a Hypothesis on the Medieval Blood Libel", *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 8.1, Leiden, 2005).

[56] See B. Lazare, *L'antisémitisme son histoire et ses causes*, Paris, 1894, ch. XIII; J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, II edn. London, 1900, pp. 173-98 (trad. it. *Il ramo d'oro. Studio sulla magia e la religione*, Turin, 1991); C. Roth, "Feast of Purim and the Origins of Blood Accusations", *Speculum*, VIII (1933), pp. 520-26; E. Horowitz, *Reckless Rites. Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence*, Princeton (N.J.), 2006.

[57] See M. Pellivert, "And Supposing They Did Drink Blood?, *Ha-Aretz*, 20 February 2007.

[58] See U. Eco, "Mangiar bambini", *L'Espresso*, 21 February 2007.

[59] See G. Todeschini, "Stereotipi antisemiti: il serbatoio e il ghiacciaio", *Zakhor*, II (1998), pp. 157-66.

[60] See Id., "Molta retorica, nessuna prova", *la Repubblica*, 9 February 2007.

[61] Robert Bonfil, a zealous disciple of Haim Beinart, pursues this line of thought, adding an extra layer of vengeful malice: "Toaff's thesis [...] is an offence against the memory of the victims of torture, it furnishes ammunition for anti-Semites of every kind, including the deniers of the Shoah, and it nullifies the seriousness of historical research and the legitimacy of our work through an arbitrary obfuscation of the boundary between truth and falsehood, between the admissible and the inadmissible" (see R. Bonfil, "Un'antica impostura riesumata", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 13 February 2007; Id., "Questo testo, una tragedia", *la Repubblica*, 15 February 2007; Id., in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 16 February 2007; Id., "What are They Worried about at Bar-Ilan University? Will They Decide to Sack Toaff?", *Ha-Aretz*, 6 March 2007).
